

Discussion of Identifying Exemplary Programs and Practices February 2013

Introduction

This item provides for a discussion of the possibility of the Commission's accreditation system identifying which programs are exemplary and disseminating that information such that other programs can learn from, and possibly replicate, to the extent possible, the successes. This item begins the process of determining how the Commission could, through its accreditation system, identify exemplary programs.

Background

The Commission's accreditation system is defined in Education Code §§44370-44374. The purposes of this accreditation system as outlined in the 2007 *Accreditation Framework* are:

- To be accountable to the public and the educator preparation profession regarding the knowledge, skills, and abilities of educators prepared in California.
- To promote quality both in educator preparation and in candidate performance.
- To ensure that all educator preparation programs prepare all prospective educators to support students in acquiring the knowledge and skills defined in California's K-12 Student Academic Content Standards.
- To support all programs in focusing on continuous improvement based on the analysis of candidate competence and program effectiveness data.

Currently, the Commission's accreditation system determines whether an institution is meeting state adopted educator preparation standards. The Commission's accreditation teams are charged with examining evidence to make a determination about whether the program and institution has met or not met standards. While sometimes it is clear that institutions or programs have particular strengths, the current accreditation system does not account for this in a finding of "exceeds standards" or other similar language. No place in our current accreditation system provides guidance or the opportunity for the Commission to identify particularly successful programs and practices. The COA has discussed this concept in the past but has not incorporated such a system to date.

Over the past year, the Commission has signaled that it is interested in pursuing the possibility of identifying exemplary practices or programs. In December 2012 the Commission (<http://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/agendas/2012-12/2012-12-4B.pdf>) discussed the 10 basic tenets of the accreditation system (Appendix A). One of these tenets states, "Currently, institutions are held to meeting the specific language of the standard and there is no attempt to identify excellence beyond meeting the standard."

In discussing this tenet, the Commission staff noted the need for clearly articulated criteria in identifying which programs are particularly successful. Staff noted that a designation that a program was especially successful or effective would require careful thought and consideration and that criteria, processes and procedures would be required in order to ensure the designation is applied fairly and consistently across the institutions and programs.

Commission staff also shared the NCATE approach of having institutions identify a target standard with the expectation that institutions have reached, or are working towards, achieving at the target level at some point in time.

In the course of discussion, Commission members cautioned that whatever process is created to identify exemplary program not become too bureaucratic or standardized. They noted that they feared that by building such a process too strictly into the accreditation system that it would hamper the ability of teams to identify those effective programs. They suggested that perhaps the identification of an effective program does not need to be limited to the entire program, but rather, could result in the identification of effective practices within that program.

Having various approaches, such as those suggested by the Commission, allows greater flexibility for the COA to discuss possible options moving forward. Some of the possible approaches could be:

- a. Whole program is designated a status of “exemplary” or “highly effective” or some other term.
- b. Particular standards are determined to be “exemplary” or “exceeds standard” or other similar category.
- c. Broad flexibility in determining which aspects of a program is determined to be exemplary. For instance, perhaps not all of Standard 8 District Employed Supervisors is exemplary, but the “training” of district employed supervisors is determined to be exemplary.
- d. Outcomes approach – Institution presents outcomes data (K-12 student growth data or other similar data) to demonstrate it is highly effective in general.
- e. Other possible approaches.

It is important to note that past accreditation visits have revealed that many educator preparation programs have aspects or components that they implement particularly well and that can arguably be considered exemplary. One of the commonalities shared by many successful programs is that they have been designed to fit exceedingly well within the local context of the K-12 schools with which they partner. The local context is a key variable that must be considered by every educator preparation program.

Questions for Discussion

To begin the process of identifying exemplary programs and practices, staff offers the following questions to discuss at this time:

1. What defines “exemplary” or “highly effective”?
2. When would a designation be made – after a site visit only?
3. What evidence would be required to determine if exemplary? Would there be an expectation that the evidence required be more than, or something different than currently required to meet the standard? For instance, might student growth scores of program completers be required to show exemplary effectiveness of particular aspects of the program?

4. Who would determine if a program is exemplary? Is this a COA decision or a team decision?
5. Would this designation be able to apply to all aspects of the program and Common Standards? Are there any standards for which it would not be appropriate?
6. What is the role of the institution and the site visit team in identifying exemplary practices? Does the institution state which part of the standards it believes it does particularly well prior to a site visit in a manner similar to the NCATE approach?
7. What role could the K-12 schools play in identifying exemplary practices?
8. What about overall effectiveness? Can the entire program be deemed exemplary by demonstrating outcomes data - K-12 student growth or other objective data?
9. What role, if any, does this designation play in determining the accreditation status of an institution? (What if one program is deemed “exemplary” and another at the institution has deficiencies that must be addressed?)
10. How would the information be disseminated?
11. What would the dissemination responsibilities be for an institution that has one or more programs designated as “exemplary”?

The questions above are meant to provide a preliminary framework by which to discuss the topic and begin to develop a system where exemplary programs can be identified.

Next Steps

Comments from the COA’s discussion will be used to develop some options for the COA’s consideration at its June meeting as well as for further discussion with the Commission. If there is Commission support, it is possible that a pilot approach could be developed in time for use in the Spring 2014 accreditation visits.

Appendix A

Tenets of the Commission's Accreditation System

The Accreditation System is the Commission's means for ensuring that approved programs are preparing educators who are effective and are focused on continuous improvement

Basic tenets of the accreditation system include:

- a. Institutions are held to the adopted standards—both Common and Program—Each standard and each phrase of in each standard
- b. Currently, the institutions are held to meeting the specific language of the standard and there is no attempt to identify excellence beyond meeting the standard
- c. Evidence needs to be provided/collected from multiple sources to support standard decisions and accreditation recommendations
- d. What an institution is asked to do should be beneficial to the institution's educator preparation efforts and the Commission's accreditation- process
- e. When an institution is required to submit something, the submission should be reviewed and feedback provided from the Commission (COA, BIR, staff)
- f. If the CTC has necessary information already, do not request that the institution submit that information again
- g. Many of the activities previously conducted during the 4-day site visit have been distributed across the seven year cycle (Biennial Report, Program Assessment and the shorter site visit)
- h. Only BIR members make standard decisions and accreditation recommendations
- i. Only the COA makes accreditation decisions
- j. Accreditation ensures program quality which leads to better prepared educators

There are clear relationships among 1) effort on part of institution—time preparing documents and in preparation for accreditation activities, and effort on part of BIR and CTC staff—to review, understand and evaluate what the institution submits; 2) evidence available for review by BIR members and staff, and confidence in BIR member decisions regarding findings on standards and recommendations on accreditation status, which directly impact 3) consistency/accuracy of the COA's decisions on accreditation and stipulations

The system should maximize the reliability, validity and consistency of accreditation decisions while not exceeding a reasonable amount of effort on the part of institutions, members of the BIR, and CTC staff.